



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

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Washington Report  
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## WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO CLAIM TO LOVE ISRAEL BUT HATE BEGIN?

In the weeks since Israel's raid on the Iraqi atomic facility and the subsequent heavy fighting in Lebanon, a new strain of opinion on the Middle East has developed. We now find a number of journalists and political leaders declaring bitter opposition to the government of Israel and the leadership of Prime Minister Menachem Begin. These same people insist that they have no quarrel with the people of Israel or with Israel as a nation. The matter is not as simple as it may seem.

Israel is a democracy. Its government, to a very large extent, reflects the fears and aspirations of the majority of the population. Any member of the Knesset can demand at any time a "vote of confidence" in the Begin-led government. Should Begin get less than 61 votes, his government would fall instantly. He would run a caretaker operation only for the time required to arrange for new elections.

The ease with which a parliamentary government such as Israel's can be changed in mid-term makes Israel, in a sense, even more democratic than the United States. Opposition to the war in Vietnam could not bring down Lyndon Johnson's government. Neither could negative reactions to Watergate force Nixon from office.

In the last election, in a contest among 31 parties, Begin's Likud and the three religious parties now in the coalition government garnered an astonishing 48% of the vote. They came within a hair's breadth of an absolute majority.

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Observers of Israeli politics should keep in mind that the cornerstones of Israeli foreign policy were not challenged by any of the mainstream parties. Begin's chief opponent, Shimon Peres, agreed that Israel should neither recognize nor negotiate with the PLO. His Labor Party agreed that a PLO state on the West Bank is unthinkable. The opposition agreed that military action is sometimes necessary to thwart PLO guerrilla operations in south Lebanon.

I do not wish to imply that Israelis are in unanimous agreement with Begin's foreign policy. Certainly there have been clear voices of dissent -- especially among intellectuals, students and the better educated elements in the population. I do want to argue that there is enough popular support for Begin's basic approach (if not all the details) to make it invalid to say, 'Begin is all wrong, but the Israelis as a people are all right.'

For better or worse, Menachem Begin as a popular democratically elected leader closely mirrors national sentiment. The bombing of the Iraqi reactor and Israeli military activity in south Lebanon reflect the pervasive cynicism Begin and most other Israelis feel towards both the United Nations and the United States. There is a strong feeling that if a distasteful military mission is needed, Israel must do the job itself -- foregoing approval or cooperation from even its most important ally, America.

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